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ABSTRACT

Curriculum development in any area should be imbued with a meaning that focuses on the cultural values of motivation, logic, and human relationships. The term "meaning" implies seeing relationships (linguistic, economic, political, moral), understanding logic, and being sensitive to the enduring values of the culture. Curriculum developers and users should understand that school and society represent countervailing forces and that the curriculum should present this tension in a mutually evaluative perspective. They should be sensitive to the epistemological bases which define course content and the notion that classroom/community discourse is an important curriculum development activity. Those involved with curriculum development must carry on a dialogue within the educational community and between that community and the rest of the world. (KC)

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META-THEORY AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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In order to see the situation more realistically, it is necessary to see, in more depth, why and how meaning is mediated, in formal systems, by isomorphisms. Douglas R. Hofstadter

In the life of the school, the relationship between meaning and form is perhaps one of the most difficult links to construct (Silverman, 1970). And nowhere is this situation more in need of being addressed than in the area of curriculum development. (Brandwein, 1982, Eisner, 1979)

The purpose of this discussion is to present elements for the construction of normative curriculum theory that will help the curriculum developer immerse the form of curriculum (design) into meaning. That is, to see curciculum development as a function of meaning. As the concept is used here, meaning has to do not only with rationale (why), but also with the deep cultural values of motivation, logic, and human relationships to which a society makes reference. Meaning, then, becomes a function of seeing relationships (linguistic, economic, political, moral, etc.), understanding logic (structures of reasoning within and among different epistemologies), and being sensitive to the enduring values of the culture. It is within this sense of meaning that the form or design of curriculum should be embedded. . . not as an inorganic or benign tumor, but as a dynamic force which interacts with the essence of the community (the human family past, present, and future).

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In this discussion, curriculum form has to do with the internal logic of design and is seen as dynamic, healthy, and useful only to the degree that it is embedded or immersed in meaning.

The central question, then, is "How can we better immerse curriculum form in meaning?" And the attempt here is to raise certain assumptions (Hartoonian, 1982) and related questions as prologue to theory building. We will try to step above or outside the realm of present curriculum theory, and see if a "grammar" or "meta-language" can be created to draw attention to new curricular designs.

To this end, four assumptions and attending questions about curriculum development are presented. These assumptions are normative in the sense that they suggest value claims about what "should" be, and together these assumptions will present a starting point for the conceptualization of curriculum design. The four assumptions to be discussed here are:

1. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT SCHOOL AND SOCIETY REPRESENT COUNTERVAILING FORCE(S), ONE TO THE OTHER, AND THE CURRICULUM SHOULD PRESENT THIS TENSION IN A MUTUALLY EVALUATIVE PERSPECTIVE.
2. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE NOT ONLY TO THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD TODAY, BUT, MORE IMPORTANT, TO THE ENDURING VALUES OF THE HUMAN FAMILY AND TO THE HUMAN IMAGINATION FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE.
3. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE META-KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTS (EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASE) WHICH CHARACTERIZE AND DEFINE COURSE CONTENT USED IN THE CLASSROOM.
4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE NOTION THAT CLASSROOM/COMMUNITY DISCOURSE CAN BE USED AS ONE IMPORTANT KIND OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY.

Let us look at the four assumptions one at a time...

1. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT SCHOOL AND SOCIETY REPRESENT COUNTERVAILING FORCES, ONE TO THE OTHER, AND THE

CURRICULUM SHOULD PRESENT THIS TENSION IN A MUTUALLY EVALUATIVE PERSPECTIVE.

While it is the case that schools reflect the community and are not a "countervailing force" (see Brandwein, 1982), it is argued here that schools should present more than a mirror to society. This does not mean that we should ask again George Count's (1932) rhetorical question in book form, "Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?" What it does mean is that school and society seen as countervailing and equal forces can help us find a way to immerse curriculum in meaning. It is clear that the school cannot forecast or determine social direction, but the school can evaluate, present a cultural perspective, and interpret education for the community. The school can also open itself to the perspectives and interpretations of the community. Thus, the school and the community can establish a more healthful relationship. . . that is, helping each other become better, with "better" being defined as paying attention to the major values of the culture, (i.e., justice, beauty, truth, etc.).

The school's relationship to the community has always been a concern for educators basically because of the support/reinforcement functions that the community performs vis-a-vis the school. Until recently, school has been, along with the home and place of worship, a primary institution. Working with the other two institutions, the school has depended upon them for its value and mode of operation. But, an intriguing thing has happened relative to the degree and quality of institutional change. While the schools have attempted to "take on" aspects and functions of other institutions, the family and church are ambivalent about relinquishing these tasks. As the institutions stumble into the future, pushed by rapid and worldwide cultural disorganizations and disorders, it has become less clear as to the legitimate boundaries among institutions.

The discrepancies among institutions (their separate rates of change and confusion over functions) are now creating an interesting tension between the school and other social institutions. This tension can be both good and/or bad for the school. One apparent negative result of this tension is the changing perception of "school" which many citizens now carry. . .a perception which is unclear at best and in some cases downright hostile. No doubt there is confusion and disarray on both sides of the street, but schools are the most vulnerable of our institutions. On the positive side, this tension can help foster a mutually evaluative perspective so necessary to program improvement. What is at issue here is the creative use of this tension to develop a pedagogical excellence and make it operational within American society.

If schools are to approach pedagogical excellence, they will have to address the community in such a way that a mutually dependent relationship can be achieved. This will be important because the school's institutional health is a function of its ability to relate to the larger community. . .telling the community about education and educating itself about the community. In a way, education must have an internal logic, a "life of its own," but, it must also explain "life in general." It is this attribute of institutional health that suggests the importance of the school's role as that of a counter force to the community. The health of the school can be seen in the community and the health of the community in the school. The institutional health of the school, in this light, is a function of its ability to be a countervailing force to society. School would be like a flywheel which helps the "machine" run more smoothly. . .a gyroscope which helps the "ship" stay on course. . .a mirror which helps the "person" evaluate beauty and ruth. . .and a scale which helps the "people" weigh justice. These metophors suggest a situation of interdependence as well as conflict . . .both of which are necessary in the evaluative process.

The curriculum that would address this "mutual evaluation" would have to be explicit relative to the role and nature of schooling in a free society. And, the curriculum items of content would, no doubt, attend to the nature of social systems, the study of school and society, and the skills and attitudes needed for criticism.

If educators take this assumption seriously, then they would place emphasis upon the development of perspective. . . the widest study of time, place, and culture. In addition, skills of inquiry, criticism, and forecasting would also be emphasized. These elements would be extremely important in the construction of curriculum. In a real sense, the question of the "good society" must become explicit. Concepts like the "social good" become operational only when such notions are applied to social settings in which the school finds itself. Conversely, a the school must be open to the growth opportunities made logically unavoidable by an intensive involvement with the community. Thus, "perspective," which the school can develop and apply, is used with the community and, in turn, the community helps the school define meaning through its involvement in the evaluation of the school program.

A conceptualization of this notion of "a two-way counter force" for curriculum development can be made possible, in part, by addressing such questions as:

*What relationships should exist between individuals and groups within and outside of the schools (settings are significant, i.e., school people in the community. . . community people in the school)?

*What opportunities exist for intergenerational communication on topics of time, place, and cultural perspectives?

*Are the major concepts of the culture (i.e., justice, beauty, truth, etc.) central to all curricular areas and institutional operations?

*Is the nurture of "community" made operational within the various school settings?

2. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE NOT ONLY TO THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD TODAY, BUT, MORE IMPORTANT, TO THE ENDURING VALUES OF THE HUMAN FAMILY AND TO THE HUMAN IMAGINATION FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE.

The concept of gross needs (i.e., food, shelter, belonging, etc.) as a precursor to curriculum development is insufficient in power to address fully the complex task of curriculum development (Tyler, 1949). While we talk of the needs of society, the child, or the discipline (knowledge), we must note that needs are a function of culture and culture is, in turn, defined through its needs. That is, once we move beyond the gross "need" statements, we must study general culture as well as culture specific items in order to get some understanding of the need(s) which education meets. For example, education as a concept is operational within any culture, but its form and function are directly related to the nature of the culture in question. Cultures not only vary in complexity and value preference, but in notions of chronology and rates of change. The curriculum must deal with chronology, change, and inter/intra-system relationships. In essence, there are two categories of needs which the institution of education addresses irrespective of whether that institution is defined in terms of father's lap, a log, a one-room school building, or a complex radio/ television education communications network. These two categories are: 1) the need to pass on the cultural heritage (the codified knowledge of the human family) from one generation to the next, and 2) the need to teach the uninitiated how to deal with problematic situations in personal and societal futures. The dynamics of these two notions of cultural

heritage (perspective) and application/decision making (probability) are always a function of culture specific as well as general cultural needs.

A conceptualization for curriculum development relative to a focus on enduring values and problematic situations can be made possible, in part, by addressing such questions as:

*What attention is given to probability and statistics as an integral part of mathematics, social studies, and science programs?

*How do all curriculum areas enhance the cultural heritage (knowledge of most worth)?

*What needs (both individual and group) are addressed by the curriculum, the hidden curriculum, and extra-curricular activities?

*How can the school community (teacher, staff, and students) take responsibility for the cultural heritage and make it dynamically alive in the thoughts and decisions made about the institution of school?

3. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE META-KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTS (EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASE) WHICH CHARACTERIZE AND DEFINE COURSE CONTENT USED IN THE CLASSROOM.

Intellectual literacy comes from an understanding of the relationships which exist between epistemology and the utilization of knowledge (applicability) in society both today and tomorrow. The educational implications of the relationship between the epistemological base and "knowledge-in-use" are both sequential and rhetorical. They tend to blend into one another so that it becomes difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. However, to the curriculum developer the understanding of the epistemological base and its relationship to how knowledge is used is critical. Epistemology is concerned

primarily with meaning. . . how we create and derive meaning from others and our environments. It provides a lens(es) through which we see, understand, and create new realities.

In a real sense, the curriculum developer and user must develop and understand the "grammar" of the knowledge that is being taught. He or she must understand the "realms of meaning" or the implicit and explicit constructs which support all pedagogical efforts. (Phenix, 1964) This is particularly the case when objectives like citizenship, environmental awareness, and even global understanding are used. These objectives simply need an epistemological base to draw upon or the possibility for disciplined study is negated.

From this assumption, it follows that different subject matter usually rests upon different epistemologies. Questions about the nature, development, and use of knowledge differ from one discipline to another. It is a mistake, therefore, to divorce curriculum development from subject matter (substance). But, it is also obvious that curriculum development proceeds differently with different subject matter. For example, if there is little disagreement over the subject matter itself, the decisions facing the curriculum developer will be confined to those of style or sequence. On the other hand, if there are disagreements concerning the subject matter itself, such as "whose" economics should be taught, then the scope and range of decisions to be made by the curriculum developer (and, for that matter, the curriculum user) is considerably expanded.

Because of the importance of the epistemological base in any curriculum design and the need for a balanced presentation relative to (knowledge) the cultural heritage, a classification scheme about knowledge is extremely important. As a minimum such a scheme might include the symbolic, synoptic, empirical, and aesthetic disciplines. These are "frames of references" which the educated mind and spirit should be able to understand, use, and relate to as a source of meaning.

In addition, emphasis should be placed upon the interrelationships among and between these areas. A conceptualization of these epistemologies and their use as a criterion for curricular development can be addressed, in part, by attending to such questions as:

*What kind of a balance exists in the several areas of the curriculum relative to the "realms of meaning" suggested by the symbolic, synoptic, empirical, and aesthetic disciplines?

*How can teachers/staff better come to understand those epistemologies in which they have little experience?

*What possibilities are there outside of the school to compliment the "realms of meaning" being addressed within the school?

*For reasons of integrity, how can "knowledge-in-use," such as a program in consumer finance be tied to the knowledge bases of the symbolic, synoptic, empirical, and aesthetic?

4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND USERS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE NOTION THAT CLASSROOM/COMMUNITY DISCOURSE CAN BE USED AS ONE IMPORTANT KIND OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY.

Those involved in the task of curriculum development must carry on a continuous dialogue within the educational community, and between the educational community and the larger world. This dialogue, this discourse, should be characterized by quality and the quality of the discussion will be judged by a series of questions such as: Are the positions taken accurately stated? Are the facts describing the policies accurate and complete? Are the arguments logical and complete? Has attention been reflectively given to supporting examples and challenging counter-examples? What are the motives implicit or explicit in the positions stated? What are the consequences of the stated positions? Finally, within this notion of classroom and community discourse

is there a reliance upon meta-knowledge and ethics? In other words, the "grammar" used by the curriculum developer and user must call attention to ethical philosophy itself. This is the case whether our concern is with intra-school, inter-school or school/community relationships. It is this component of the curriculum which will allow for renewal, regeneration, and evaluation. This means taking seriously the notion that the classroom as well as the school must be a community (of scholars) where individuals feel some cohesiveness to the group because there is an ethical reference point beyond the individual and located in some sense of "the common good."

This means that the school is not child-centered, teacher-centered, nor neighborhood-centered. It is school-centered (a community of scholars). But, for this to happen, parents, teachers, and students must know what they believe (stand for) and possess the ability to communicate same. Within the community, if we cannot logically cope with that which we must define and communicate, then our reference point will remain personal and self-centered, and defeat the whole purpose of the "public good."

A conceptualization of classroom/community discourse for curriculum development can be enhanced, in part, by addressing such questions as:

*Since institutions control speech acts within a social context, what activities should be engaged in to make explicit the meanings of these speech acts?

*How and when are statements about curriculum also statements about power?

*What categories of commitments (control, management, controversy, or lack thereof) are used in discourse within the school and between the school and town?

*What political and ethical standards are explicit in the discursive practices of schooling?

Taken together, the above assumptions and attending questions can help curriculum designers conceptualize and place curriculum form within cultural meaning. It is hoped that in some small way, these elements of meta-theory can illuminate relationships of epistemology, discourse, cultural imagination, and school/community settings. And these relationships can help, in turn, to provide the basis for new theories of curriculum that more adequately address the fullness of what it means to be "educated" in the last decades of the 20th century and beyond.

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